



TOP
TEN

WEATHER EVENTS

OF

2020

No.
1

TOP WEATHER EVENTS

OF

2020

RECORD SETTING WILDFIRE SEASON

A dry spring and summer led to the continuation of the drought across eastern Utah and western Colorado.

The worsening drought paired with above seasonal temperatures and breezy conditions resulted in a record setting wildfire season.

The two most notable fires in 2020 were the Pine Gulch and Grizzly Creek Fires.

**Grizzly Creek Fire
(Summit Fire & EMS)**



Pine Gulch Fire (Wyoming Hotshots)



The Pine Gulch Fire was started by lightning north of Grand Junction on July 31st. It grew to 139,007 acres before being contained on September 23rd.

The Grizzly Creek Fire was a human caused fire that started near Glenwood Springs on August 10th. It grew to 32,631 acres before reaching containment status on December 18th.

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TOP WEATHER EVENTS

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JUNE 6TH
DERECHO

A strong trough moved through the region on the morning and afternoon of June 6th, causing a widespread severe weather event that would become the first derecho to impact the Western Slope in well over a decade. Severe storms produced wind gusts upwards of 60 to 80 mph on average with some gusts topping 80 to 100 mph in some areas due to strong downburst winds.



Craig, Colorado (Lucas Bergstrom)



Grand Mesa, Colorado
(Shawn Montgomery)

There were multiple reports of uprooted trees, downed power lines, at least one roof was torn off with others damaged, and several houses/cabins and vehicles were damaged by falling trees and/or large hail. Very heavy rain also fell which led to flash flooding in some areas.

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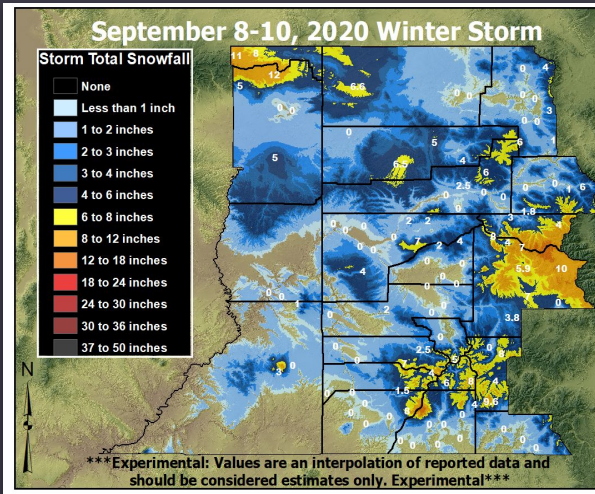
TOP WEATHER EVENTS

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SEPTEMBER 8-10 EARLY SEASON WINTER STORM

An abnormally strong and cold low pressure system and associated cold front dropped south across the Northern Rockies and into the Four Corners. The low remained quasi-stationary for about a day before lifting northeast into the Plains. This system produced widespread showers of rain in the lower elevations and snow in the mountains, though the cold front dropped snow levels to approximately 7000 feet.



Crested Butte, Colorado
(Kay Peterson Cook)

High winds led to not only reduced visibility in blowing snow, but also numerous downed trees and power outages in some areas.

Leading up to this storm, record heat occurred across the area with critical fire weather conditions. Triple digit heat was recorded in Moab, Utah and the Grand Junction Regional Airport topped out at 99°F two days in a row on September 5th and 6th.

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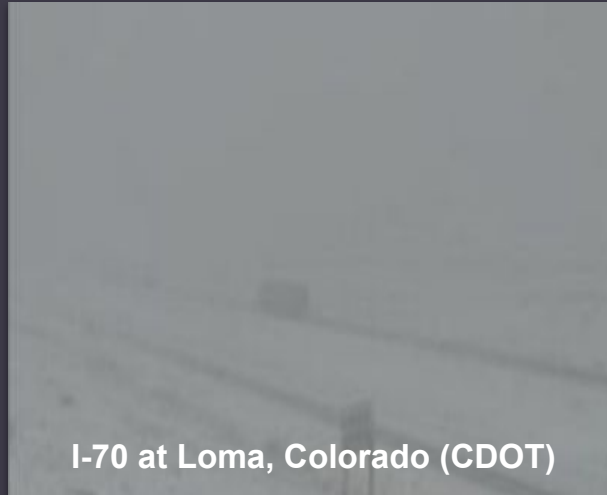
2020

OCTOBER 24-26 EARLY SEASON WINTER STORM

A very strong and dynamic cold front moved through eastern Utah and western Colorado. Rain quickly switched over to snow for almost the entire forecast area. The snow caused driving issues, especially along I-70, and also brought power outages to the region as trees, overloaded with snow, fell and brought down power lines.



Grand Junction Airport (NWS)



I-70 at Loma, Colorado (CDOT)

Several snowfall records were broken. Once the front passed, bitterly cold temperatures moved in breaking many high and low temperature records.

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DECEMBER 22ND SNOW SQUALLS

A cold front moved through northwest and west-central Colorado on December 22nd with a strong band of showers developing north of I-70. Marginal instability fueled snow squalls which led to hazardous travel conditions in near white-out conditions as winds gusted over 60 MPH at times.

Steamboat Springs
(Samantha Tisdall)



Squall moving through Craig
(Craig Airport)

At least 10 to 20 wrecks and slide offs were reported along the I-70 corridor between Gypsum, Wolcott and Vail Pass. The snow squalls were captured by the public near Steamboat Springs and even by a webcam in Craig.

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MAY 11TH SEVERE STORMS

An unseasonably moist Pacific shortwave trough lifted across eastern Utah and western Colorado and produced scattered to numerous showers beginning the night of May 10th. A break in the clouds the morning of May 11th fueled the atmosphere's instability and allowed showers and thunderstorms to redevelop across the region.

Severe hail in Olathe, Colorado
(Brooke Coats)



Fence damage in the Redlands in
Grand Junction (NWS)

The stronger storms produced frequent lightning, heavy rain, gusty winds to 63 MPH, and large hail. Mesa County Dispatch reported numerous vehicles had to shelter under the highway overpass due to quarter-sized hail on I-70 south of De Beque with resulting slowdowns on the highway.

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APRIL 14TH
FREEZE EVENT
AND FRUIT
DAMAGE

Arctic air was advected into the region on April 14th in the wake of a departing system. Clear skies paired with cold mid-level temperatures and light winds led to subfreezing temperatures across portions of west-central Colorado. These bitterly cold temperatures led to significant peach crop damage in the Grand Valley. A new record low temperature of 19° was set at the Grand Junction Airport, breaking the previous record of 21°. Peach and apricot farmers in Palisade, Colorado estimated that more than half of the peach crop got damaged. Some orchards saw 95% kill of fruit buds. The Governor of Colorado requested a Declaration of Disaster from the USDA for the agricultural community on the Western Slope of Colorado as a result of the hard freeze damage.



Icicles drip from a peach tree after water was sprayed in an attempt to slow a recent freeze.
(Christopher Tomlinson)

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FEBRUARY 24TH ASPEN SNOW SQUALL

A strong cold front moved across the Western Slope on the morning of February 24th. The cold front, combined with a tight pressure gradient, instability aloft, and favorable upper level dynamics, produced strong winds at the surface. This led to the development of a snow squall which progressed through the Roaring Fork Valley between 7:30 and 8:30 AM.

**View before the snow squall begins
(Aspen Snowmass)**



**View as the snow squall begins to
move through (Aspen Snowmass)**



Winds gusted from 55 to 65 MPH with the squall which led to significantly reduced visibility in blowing snow. This resulted in severe travel impacts along I-70 with Vail Pass being closed for a couple of hours due to white-out conditions as the squall moved through.

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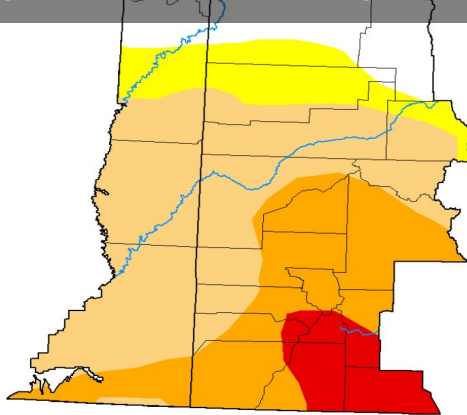
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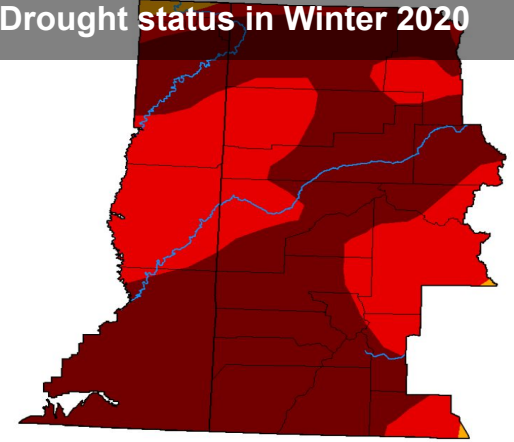
EXTREME TO EXCEPTIONAL DROUGHT

Warmer than normal temperatures and below normal precipitation prevailed across much of eastern Utah and western Colorado during 2020. This led to the redevelopment of the drought in late Spring with the drought continuing to expand and worsen as the year progressed.

Drought status in late Spring 2020



Drought status in Winter 2020



By Winter 2020, the extreme (D3) to exceptional (D4) drought encompassed almost all of eastern Utah and western Colorado. These are the two worst categories of the drought. A small sliver of the severe (D2) drought lingered in far northeast Utah.

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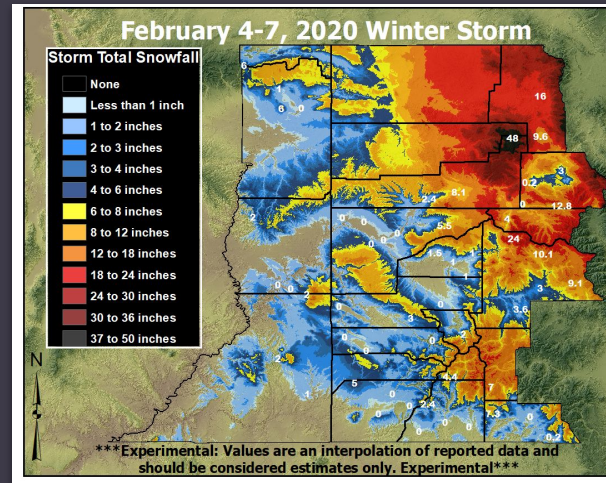
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FEBRUARY 4-7 WINTER STORM

A prolonged period of strong northwest flow carried sufficient moisture from a decaying atmospheric river and produced significant snow over the mountains of western Colorado, as well as some northern and central valleys. Snow favored the northwestern and western slopes across the northern and central portions of the forecast area with over 3 feet of snow falling in some areas.

Near Oak Creek, Colorado
(Steve Strickler)



Wind gusts with this storm exceeded 50 MPH which led to reduced visibility in blowing snow. This severely impacted travel, particularly along I-70 with Vail Pass closing several times throughout the event. The heavy snow led to treacherous backcountry conditions and the increased threat for avalanches with the CAIC having to issue numerous Avalanche Warnings.